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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000952

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW ARMED GROUPS JOINING THE OLD FIS?

REF: A) FBIS LD 1502183497 B) ALGIERS 864  
C) 96 ALGIERS 250, 632 AND 1062  
D) ALGIERS 931 E) FBIS MM1212143096  
F) FBIS MM1109104796

11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN,  
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS, REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D).

12. (C) SUMMARY: THE ABILITY OF THE LONG-BANNED  
ISLAMIC SALVATION FRONT (FIS) TO RESTRAIN THE  
ISLAMIST ARMED GROUPS HERE IS QUESTIONABLE. OVER  
TIME, HOWEVER, THE BARBAROUS ATROCITIES OF THE ARMED  
ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA) MAY BE WORKING IN THE FIS' FAVOR  
AMONG ISLAMIST ARMED GROUPS. THERE ARE SIGNS,  
ALBEIT SMALL AND TENTATIVE, THAT MORE GROUPS ARE  
CLAIMING LOYALTY TO THE ORIGINAL FIS LEADERSHIP OF  
ABASSI MADANI AND ALI BENHADJ (JAILED SINCE 1991).  
THERE ARE ALSO SOME HINTS THAT THESE GROUPS ARE  
JOINING OR AT LEAST WORKING TOGETHER. THEY HAVE  
CALLED FOR MORAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE  
ISLAMIC "MOVEMENTS" (INCLUDING, PERHAPS, IRAN). THE  
NEW EFFORTS TOWARDS COORDINATION OR UNITY MAY NOT  
SUCCEED IN THE END; THE ARMED ISLAMIST GROUPS ON THE  
WHOLE REMAIN SERIOUSLY SPLIT IN TERMS OF IDEOLOGY  
AND LEADERSHIP. WE SEE NO SIGN THAT THEY ARE  
STRONGER MILITARILY. IN ADDITION, THEY HAVE GIVEN  
NO INDICATION THEY WILL BE LOYAL TO THE FIS  
LEADERSHIP IN EXILE, UNDER REBAH KEBIR IN GERMANY.  
END SUMMARY.

A NEW FIS ATTACK ON THE GIA  
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13. (C) THERE ARE SOME SMALL, AND STILL TENTATIVE,  
INDICATIONS THAT THE ISLAMIC SALVATION FRONT (FIS)  
IS TRYING TO REASSERT CONTROL OVER THE ARMED GROUPS  
ONCE LOYAL TO THE ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA). THE  
TREND SO FAR APPEARS LIMITED MAINLY TO CENTRAL  
ALGERIA. THE FEBRUARY 1997 ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE  
ISLAMIC LEAGUE FOR THE (ISLAMIC) CALL AND FOR DJIHAD  
(IN FRENCH, LIDD) EMPHASIZES THE LEAGUE'S LOYALTY TO  
ABASSI MADANI AND ALI BENHADJ (SEE REFS A AND B).  
(IT ALSO PRAISES THE MEMORY OF ANOTHER FIS LEADER,  
MOHAMED SAID, THE LEADER OF THE FIS' DJAZAIR'IST  
WING.) FOUR MEN SIGNED THE COMMUNIQUE. THE FIRST  
TWO, ALI BENHADJER AND MAHFOUD RAHMANI HIGHLIGHTED  
THEIR STATUS AS FIS OFFICIALS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT  
IN 1991; THE THIRD, YOUSSEF BOUBRAS, NOTES THAT HE  
WAS THE FIS PRESIDENT OF THE BOUIRA OFFICE AND LATER  
A MEMBER OF THE FIS EXECUTIVE OFFICE.

14. (S) THE LIDD COMMUNIQUE SINGLES OUT THE  
GOVERNMENT'S "PLOT" AGAINST THE ISLAMIC DJIHAD IN  
ALGERIA AS BEING EMBODIED IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE  
ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA). THE CAMPAIGN, THE LIDD  
SAID, DEVIATED INTO KILLING THE "BEST SCHOLARS,  
PREACHERS AND MOUJADHIDINE." IT THEN SAID THAT  
FAITHFUL MUSLEM SOLDIERS ARE, THEREFORE, QUITTING  
THE GIA. IT CALLS ON THOSE YOUNG MEN IN THE GIA TO  
UNDERSTAND THAT MASSACRES ARE NOT JUSTIFIABLE UNDER  
ISLAM, BUT RATHER ARE THE WORK OF THE ALGERIAN

INTELLIGENCE SERVICES.

15. (S) THE LIDD COMMUNIQUE TOUCHES ONLY BRIEFLY ON RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES. IT STRONGLY DENOUNCES PAST FRENCH COLONIAL POLICY IN ALGERIA. (IT MAKES NO MENTION OF THE U.S.) IT ALSO CALLS ON "OTHER ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS" TO PROVIDE SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL AIDE TO THE ALGERIAN DJIHAD. (COMMENT: THE LIDD MIGHT LOOK TO THE IRANIANS AND OTHERS FOR ASSISTANCE. WE RECALL THAT THE IRANIANS HAVE DENOUNCED PUBLICLY THE GIA'S CAMPAIGN OF INDISCRIMINATE CAR BOMBINGS IN ALGERIA AS THE WORK OF ALGERIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) THE GIA'S MURDER OF MOHAMED SAID AND HIS FOLLOWERS IN LATE 1995 SPURRED A NUMBER OF LOCAL GIA MEMBERS TO QUIT THE GROUP IN EARLY 1996 (SEE REFS C, D). AN APPARENTLY GENUINE "AL-DJIHAD" BULLETIN FROM THE SPRING OF 1996 CLAIMED THAT THESE GROUPS EXTENDED FROM THE LARBAA AND MEDEA REGIONS SOUTH OF THE CAPITAL (THE MEDEA GROUP LED BY ALI BENHADJER) TO BOUSAADA ON THE HIGH PLATEAU. WE REPORTED LAST YEAR THAT SOME OF THESE GIA SPLINTERS WERE SYMPATHETIC TO MOHAMED SAID AND HAD REGROUPED UNDER THE BANNER OF THE OLD DJAZAIR'IST AL-FIDA GROUP.

17. (C) IN THE FEBRUARY 1997 LIDD COMMUNIQUE, THE FOURTH SIGNER IS "AHMED ABOU EL-FIDA," SAID TO BE THE COMMANDER OF THE AL-FIDA. (COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW EXACTLY WHO AHMED ABOU AL-FIDA IS. ACCORDING TO A WELL-INFORMED JOURNALIST, WHO HAS SOURCES IN THE ALGERIAN SECURITY SERVICES, HIS REAL NAME IS ABDELLAH SEDOUKI (NFI). WE HAVE OBTAINED AN APPARENTLY GENUINE COMMUNIQUE FROM AHMED ABOU AL-FIDA CLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE JANUARY 28 KILLING OF ABDELHAK BENHAMOUDA, PRESIDENT ZEROUAL'S ALLY. END COMMENT.) THE LIDD COMMUNIQUE, THUS, SUGGESTS THAT AL-FIDA OF CENTRAL ALGERIA HAS RETURNED FULL CIRCLE FROM THE GIA TO THE FIS.

18. (C) IN ADDITION, THE LIDD'S MAHFOUD RAHMANI COMES FROM M'SILA, WHILE YOUSSEF BOUBRAS COMES FROM BOUIRA. (A LAWYER IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH FIS LEADERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE ALGERIA TOLD US JANUARY 28 OF A MID-JANUARY AMBUSH AGAINST THE ALGERIAN ARMY WHICH KILLED DOZENS OF SOLDIERS IN BOUIRA.) THUS, THE LIDD SUGGESTS, ALBEIT TENTATIVELY, THAT ARMED GROUPS LOYAL TO THE FIS NOW EXTEND FROM MEDEA EAST TO BOUIRA AND PERHAPS EVEN TO M'SILA AND BOUSAADA TO THE SOUTHEAST.

18. (S) (COMMENT: IF/IF THIS IS TRUE, IT IS A DIFFERENT PICTURE OF THE ARMED GROUPS FROM WHAT WE SAW IN LATE 1994 AND THROUGHOUT 1995 AND 1996. DURING THAT TIME, THERE WERE FEW SIGNS THAT THE FIS, DEFINED AS THE LEADERSHIP OF ABASSI MADANI AND ALI BENHADJ, HAD THE LOYALTY OF ANY ARMED GROUPS OUTSIDE THE ISLAMIC SALVATION ARMY (AIS) GROUPS IN THE JIJEL/SKIKDA REGION IN THE EAST AND THE RELIZANE/MASCARA/SIDI BEL ABBES REGION IN THE WEST. END COMMENT.)

ANOTHER GIA SPLIT: AL-BAQAOUN  
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19. (C) THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE OTHER IN-FIGHTING INSIDE THE GIA DURING THE PAST YEAR (SEE REF D ABOUT WESTERN ALGERIA, FOR EXAMPLE). NOTABLY, GIA GROUPS AROUND CHLEF IN DECEMBER 1996 REPORTEDLY REBELLED AGAINST THE CORE GIA UNDER ANTAR ZOUABRI AND ELECTED A FORMER FIGHTER FROM AFGHANISTAN NAMED SLIMANE MAHERZI AS THEIR LEADER, ACCORDING TO THE SOMETIMES WELL-INFORMED LONDON NEWSPAPER ASH-SHARQ AL-AWSET (REF E). MAHERZI, WHOSE WAR NAME IS ABDERAHMANE ABOU DJAMIL, WAS ALSO REPORTED TO BE THE LEADER OF AL-BAQAOUN 'ALA AL-'AHD, ACCORDING TO THE

OFTEN WELL-INFORMED LONDON NEWSPAPER AL-HAYAT (REF F). ACCORDING TO THESE LONDON PRESS SOURCES, ABOU DJAMIL'S BASE OF OPERATION IS WEST OF THE CAPITAL BETWEEN CHLEF AND BLIDA.

¶10. (C) WHILE MAHERZI APPEARS TO HAVE SPLIT WITH THE GIA UNDER ZOUABRI, IT IS NOT CLEAR IF HE HAS ALIGNED WITH BENHADJER'S LIDD AGAINST THEIR COMMON ENEMIES, ZOUABRI AND THE ALGERIAN ARMY. A WELL-INFORMED ALGERIAN JOURNALIST ASSERTED THAT AL-BAQAOUN IS PART OF THE LEAGUE (SEE REF B). THE FRENCH EMBASSY PROVIDED US A COPY OF A POSSIBLY GENUINE JANUARY 1997 AL-BAQAOUN COMMUNIQUE WHICH CONFIRMED AL-FIDA KILLED ABDELHAK BENHAMOUDA AND CALLED AL-FIDA THE FAITHFUL'S "COLLEAGUES." THE COMMUNIQUE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED THE MURDER AND THE AL-FIDA CLAIM OF RESPONSIBILITY; IT SUGGESTS THAT THE TWO GROUPS MIGHT BE IN REGULAR CONTACT. IN ADDITION, THE SEPTEMBER 1996 AL-BAQAOUN COMMUNIQUE REFERS TO THE UNJUSTIFIED GIA KILLING OF "PREACHERS AND MOUJAHIDINE"--LANGUAGE IDENTICAL TO THAT OF THE AL-FIDA AND THE LIDD IN FEBRUARY 1997. MOREOVER, THE OATH IN THE GROUP'S NAME IS, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, ONE OF LOYALTY TO MADANI AND BENHADJ, JUST AS THAT EXPRESSED BY BENHADJER (SEE REFS B AND D).

¶11. (C) NOT ALL SIGNS SUGGEST THAT AL-BAQAOUN DEFINITELY HAS JOINED WITH AL-FIDA, AND HENCE TO THE LIDD. THE AL-BAQAOUN COMMUNIQUE ABOUT BENHAMOUDA WAS IN FRENCH, WHICH MADE SOME OBSERVERS WHO SAW IT IMMEDIATELY SUSPICIOUS THAT THE COMMUNIQUE WAS A GOVERNMENT-PRODUCED FAKE. WE HAVE ALSO RECEIVED AN APPARENTLY GENUINE FEBRUARY 1997 AL-BAQAOUN COMMUNIQUE, IN ARABIC, WHICH STRONGLY DENOUNCES THOSE WHO WOULD NEGOTIATE WITH THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT. THE SEPTEMBER 1996 COMMUNIQUE DID SO AS WELL. SINCE MADANI AND BENHADJ DID TALK WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN 1994 AND 1995, ABOU DJAMIL'S LOYALTY TO THEM WOULD HAVE TO BE QUESTIONABLE IF EITHER COMMUNIQUE IS GENUINE.

¶12. (C) MEANWHILE, THE FIS LEADERSHIP IN EXILE HAS UNDERGONE OTHER TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE PAST MONTH. MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT EXPELLED KHEIREDDINE KHERBANE FROM ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. OUR FIS LAWYER SOURCE TOLD US MARCH 10 THAT KHERBANE TOO OFTEN STRAYED PUBLICLY FROM THE OFFICIAL FIS LINE. IN ADDITION, HE SAID, KHERBANE'S CONTACTS IN LONDON WITH PERSONS THOUGHT LINKED TO THE GIA MADE KEBIR AND OTHER FIS OFFICIALS NERVOUS. HE ADDED THAT THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HAS APPOINTED ABDELKRIM OULD ADDA, A PROFESSOR ORIGINALLY FROM MOSTAGANEM AND A KEBIR AIDE, TO BE THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S SPOKESMAN. THIS SOURCE BELIEVES THE CHANGES TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AIM AT CONSOLIDATING KEBIR'S AUTHORITY OVER THE COMMITTEE.

COMMENT:

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¶13. (C) COMPARED TO ANALYSES OF ALGERIA'S SPLINTERED ARMED ISLAMIST GROUPS, ECONOMICS IS AN EXTREMELY PRECISE SCIENCE. LOCAL RIVALRIES, IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES, AND THE GROUPS' INSTINCTIVE PENCHANT FOR SECRECY AND NAME CHANGES, NOT TO MENTION FAKE COMMUNIQUES AND OTHER PRESSURE FROM THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT, MAKE ALL JUDGEMENTS HIGHLY PRONE TO ERROR. NONETHELESS, WE HAZARD THAT THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

-- THE RUTHLESS TACTICS OF ANTAR ZOUABRI AND THE "CORE" GIA HAVE ALIENATED SUBSTANTIAL PARTS OF THE GROUP'S MEMBERS;

-- THERE ARE NEW (OR RENEWED) GROUPS IN CENTRAL ALGERIA WHO EITHER BY COMMUNIQUE OR BY THEIR VERY

NAME HAVE LEFT THE GIA AND AGAIN CLAIM LOYALTY TO THE TRADITIONAL FIS LEADERSHIP OF ABASSI MADANI AND ALI BENHADJ;

-- THESE GROUPS' LOYALTY TO THE TRADITIONAL FIS LEADERSHIP, CREATES A NEW ALIGNMENT OF ISLAMIST FORCES BOTH IN CENTRAL ALGERIA, AND PERHAPS EVEN NATIONALLY, COMPARED TO THE DISPOSITION OF 1994 OR 1995;

-- IN ADDITION, THE FIS APPEARS TO STILL HAVE THE LOYALTY OF THE ISLAMIC SALVATION ARMY, LOCATED IN EASTERN AND WESTERN ALGERIA;

-- IT STILL SEEMS TOO EARLY TO KNOW IF EFFORTS BY GROUPS LIKE ALI BENHADJER'S LIDD TO MERGE OR ALLY WITH OTHER ARMED GROUPS, LIKE AL-BAQAOUN, HAVE, IN FACT, SUCCEEDED;

-- EFFORTS TO UNIFY ARE SIGNIFICANT MAINLY IN TERMS OF POLITICAL ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER; AND

-- TENTATIVE EFFORTS TO UNIFY THEIR RANKS DOES NOT MEAN THESE ARMED GROUPS ARE STRONGER MILITARILY; RATHER, THEIR EFFORTS MAY BE IN RESPONSE TO TREMENDOUS PRESSURE FROM THE "CORE" GIA AND THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT.

¶14. (C) WHILE THE LIDD, AL-FIDA AND AL-BAQAOUN COULD BE LOYAL TO THE FIS AS PERSONIFIED BY ABASSI MADANI AND ALI BENHADJ, NOWHERE HAVE WE SEEN THEM EXPRESS LOYALTY TO THE FIS LEADERSHIP IN EXILE UNDER REBAH KEBIR. (INDEED, SOME OF THE AL-BAQAOUN COMMUNIQUE'S IMPLICITLY ATTACK THE EXILES.) THUS, THE EXILE LEADERSHIP IS UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO DO MUCH TO REDUCE VIOLENCE. EVEN THE EXTENT OF MADANI AND BENHADJ'S ABILITY TO REDUCE SIGNIFICANTLY THE ONGOING VIOLENCE IS QUESTIONABLE (AFTER ALL, THESE GROUPS MAY USE THEM AS A RALLYING POINT ONLY BECAUSE THEY ARE IN NO POSITION TO GIVE ORDERS).

NEUMANN